Of the East Asian Cultural Sphere: Theorizing Cultural Regionalization

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Abstract

This essay questions the conceptual pertinence of globalization in analyzing the fast-growing cultural exchanges across East and Southeast Asia. Critiquing the theoretical backbone of globalization, it proposes a shift to cultural regionalization as an interpretive framework suited to the emergent cultural topographies of the region. The essay then details the major attributes of cultural regionalization by introducing what might be termed the East Asian Cultural Sphere, a temporary crystallization of East Asian cultural interdynamics that has emerged in the post–Cold War juncture and continues to evolve to date. In an attempt to give concrete pictures of both cultural regionalization and the East Asian Cultural Sphere, the essay broaches the instance of Hallyu, the Korean wave, a cultural crosscurrent arising from the collision of two opposing waves: the escalation of political tension based on post/colonial feuds, which remained largely unaddressed during the Cold War period, on one hand and the sweeping economic integration and collaboration of East Asia on the other.

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